

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 694

By Cobb

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of a true Tennessee hero,  
United States Marine Corps Brigadier General  
Austin Conner Shofner of Shelbyville.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, the late Brigadier General Austin Conner Shofner of the United States Marine Corps is one such courageous volunteer who proudly served this nation with the utmost courage and dedication befitting a true Tennessee hero; and

WHEREAS, born in Chattanooga on March 3, 1916, the son of Austin Williams Shofner and Rachel Conner Shofner, Austin Conner Shofner was raised in his father's ancestral home of Bedford County and graduated from the local high school in 1933. He would remain a legal resident of the county through the years; and

WHEREAS, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree from the College of Commerce at the University of Tennessee in 1937, Austin Conner Shofner distinguished himself as a gentleman, scholar, and athlete. He won the "T" club scholarship award as the athlete with the highest grades. While at UT, he lettered in football and wrestling, served as President of the Kappa Alpha Order Fraternity, and was the representative from the College of Commerce to the All Students Club; and

WHEREAS, due to his scholarship, leadership and character while at the University of Tennessee, Austin Conner Shofner became the only graduate that year to receive an appointment to the United States Marine Corps. He spent his first year of duty at the Marine

Corps Basic Officer School in Philadelphia before serving one year of sea duty on the battleship, *Oklahoma*; and

WHEREAS, stationed for two years at San Diego, California with the Second Marine Division, Austin Conner Shofner served as platoon leader and company commander. He was also an assistant coach and player for the undefeated San Diego Marine football team in 1939 and continued as line coach in 1940, his playing days ended by a knee injury; and

WHEREAS, in early 1941, Mr. Shofner was stationed in Shanghai, China, where he served as a company commander in the Fourth Marine Regiment guarding the International Sector of Shanghai until November of that year when he was moved to the Philippines. At the onset of the United States' involvement in World War II, Captain Shofner participated in the defense of Bataan and of Corregidor; and

WHEREAS, upon the surrender of Corregidor in May of 1942, he was captured and endured eleven months as a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese. Thousands of prisoners died from starvation and disease, including many of Captain Shofner's best friends and fellow Marines; and

WHEREAS, on April 4, 1943, Mr. Shofner led the first, and only, successful escape party from a Japanese prison camp; his escape party consisted of eleven other soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. After thirty-five days, the group located and joined a Filipino guerrilla unit; and

WHEREAS, although Mr. Shofner remained in the Philippines for another six months, leading Filipino guerrillas against the Japanese, members of his escape party returned to the United States and revealed the atrocities being committed against American POWs and the citizens of the American Commonwealth of the Philippines; and

WHEREAS, through Mr. Shofner and his escape party, the government and people of the United States learned for the first time of the Bataan Death March, where ten thousand American and Filipino soldiers died at the hands of the Japanese, and of the brutal suffering, torture, and death of men in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. By the end of the war, 40 percent of the prisoners of war held by the Japanese had succumbed to torture, starvation, and disease; and

WHEREAS, because of the information brought home by Mr. Shofner and his compatriots, the United States and her Allies were compelled to alter their strategy in World War II. Operations were developed to take the war directly to the Japanese homeland. The war in the Pacific was now fought with the same priority as the war in Europe. This expedient strategy, brought about by the urgency to resolve the war against Japan, shortened the war, and saved countless thousands of lives; and

WHEREAS, eventually evacuated to Australia by an American submarine from the Philippines, Lt. Shofner, the very epitome of the dedicated and judicious officer, returned to the Pacific Theater in 1944 as a member of the First Marine Division. He served as assault battalion commander in the Peleliu landing and was wounded in action. After the island was secure, he was assigned to the U.S. Army for the invasion of Luzon, Philippines, as Marine Corps liaison and advisor on guerilla affairs. Through his personal reconnaissance behind the lines and his liaison with guerrilla leaders, A.C. Shofner rescued 500 American and Allied prisoners slated for death at the Japanese prison camp at Cabanatuan; and

WHEREAS, on April 1, 1945, his battalion led the assault during the last major landing operation in the Pacific at Okinawa, being in the front lines during most of the campaign. Lt. Colonel Shofner was one of the leading Marines in number of days of combat and one of the most decorated for combat during World War II; and

WHEREAS, for his service in World War II, Lt. Colonel Shofner was awarded the Army's Distinguished Service Cross, the Legion of Merit with V for valor, two Silver Stars, the Bronze Star with V, two Purple Hearts, the Chinese Cloud and Banner, and numerous campaign and service medals. He was presented the Distinguished Service Cross personally by General Douglas MacArthur for his daring guerilla actions; and

WHEREAS, at the end of World War II, Austin Connor Shofner and the First Marine Division were stationed in Tientsin, China . After six months of occupation duty, he returned stateside to Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia for a year, serving as battalion commander and head coach of the well known Quantico Marines football team; and

WHEREAS, on March 1, 1947, he married Kathleen King of Knoxville and the young couple soon departed for Lima, Peru where Mr. Shofner served as Naval Attaché at the

American Embassy under Ambassador Prentice Cooper of Tennessee. The first of the Shofners' five sons would be born in Peru; and

WHEREAS, having received the Order of the Sol from the President of Peru in recognition of his efforts to foster good relations between the navies of Peru and the United States, Austin Connor Shofner returned to the U.S. after completing his two and one-half year-tour of duty in Peru and was assigned to the Marine Corps Reserves in New York City; and

WHEREAS, with the outbreak of the Korean Conflict, the Marine Reserves were mobilized and transferred to the Second Marine Division at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. A.C. Shofner served as Executive Officer of the Second Marine Division training replacements for Korea. At Camp LeJeune, he was promoted to the rank of Colonel and then transferred to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina; and

WHEREAS, in July, 1954, Colonel Shofner was assigned to Washington, D.C. to serve on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations as planning officer for Latin America. He was also the U.S. Navy's member of the Inter-American Defense Board, the Joint United States-Mexican Defense Commission, and the Joint United States-Brazil Defense Commission; and

WHEREAS, upon his return to Camp LeJeune in July of 1957, Colonel Shofner was assigned as Commanding Officer of the famous Sixth Marines, the most decorated regiment in the United States Marine Corps. After one year as regimental commander, he served another year on the staff of the Commanding General of the Second Marine Division; and

WHEREAS, in 1959, Austin Connor Shofner was a student at the Army War College, where he retired from the United States Marine Corps and was promoted to Brigadier General. He returned home to Bedford County, where he remained a highly respected and cherished member of the Shelbyville community; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Shofner was the Founder and President of Midstate Finance Co., Inc., and Peoples Finance Co., Inc., and the Founder and member of the Board of Directors of the Plateau Insurance Company and Citizens State Bank of Marion County; and

WHEREAS, General Shofner also contributed his time and immeasurable talents as a member of the Rotary Club, River Bend Country Club, Sons of the American Revolution, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division Association (Shofner Unit); and

WHEREAS, A.C. Shofner was an active and devout member of the Shofner's Lutheran Church, where he faithfully served his Lord and Savior for many years; and

WHEREAS, General Shofner was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, he enjoyed the loving companionship of his devoted wife, the late Kathleen King Shofner, and was the proud father of five sons, William Emory Shofner, Martin King Shofner, Robert Stewart Shofner, Michael Monroe Shofner and the late Austin Conner Shofner, Jr., and the beloved grandfather of seven treasured grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, General Shofner served as the mentor of the Tennessee Chapter of the First Marine Division, which boasts over 100 members of the First Marine Division. He was most active during his latter years and attended quarterly meetings all over the state. He was also mentor of the Marine Corps League Detachment in Tullahoma; and

WHEREAS, Brigadier General Shofner would take great pride in knowing that the First Marine Division Association will hold their annual reunion in his beloved Tennessee in 2008 in Nashville and that their legacy of service continues with the active First Marine Division, today based at Camp Pendleton, California, proudly serving in Iraq; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly should pause to remember the singular patriotism, courage, and commitment to duty of this exceptional soldier and human being, the late Brigadier General Austin Connor Shofner, United States Marine Corps; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of United States Marine Corps Brigadier General Austin Conner Shofner, a man of impeccable character, limitless courage, and stalwart commitment to his nation as a member of the United States Marine Corps, reflecting fondly upon his bravery and dedication to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.